WHERE WE STAND
in your COMMUNITY

A SNAPSHOT OF NOVA SCOTIA LIBRARY USERS

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NOVA SCOTIA
Department of Education

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SUMMER 2002

NOVA SCOTIA
Department of Education

106-04942/

Executive Summary

Nova Scotia public libraries provide library and information services to the citizens of the province through a network of 76 branch libraries, mobile branch libraries and Books-By-Mail service. Public libraries offer a wide variety of services, such as collections of materials in a variety of formats for loan to the public; print and electronic reference resources; programs to enhance literacy and research skills for people of all ages; public Internet access; interlibrary loan service; readers' advisory service; and outreach programs to bring library services to targeted populations.

In the summer of 2002, the nine regional libraries in Nova Scotia conducted a survey of library users to provide a description of Nova Scotia library users; determine library users' assessment of the contribution made to communities by public libraries; and to assess library users' satisfaction with services provided.

Several themes emerged from the data collected through the 2374 returned surveys.

Libraries are important community resources.
A high percentage of survey respondents consider their public library to be a key component of their community. On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is "not at all important" and 5 is "very important", 88% of respondents gave a rating of 4 or 5. Library users said that libraries are assets to the community, providing an important source of entertainment, intellectual stimulation and social contact. Libraries are considered important for supporting continued learning and reading for leisure, as well as providing free access to a variety of resources.

Libraries provide access to information technology.
Thirty nine percent of survey respondents depend on library computers for access to the Internet for school, business and recreational purposes. Seventeen percent of respondents also use library computers to meet their word processing needs.

It is important for libraries to provide access to information for people who cannot read.
Seventy eight percent of respondents indicated that it is important for libraries to provide access to large print books, books on tape and talking books. Provision of these services was considered important for people who are visually impaired, or who for other reasons are unable to read books.

Libraries enhance access to information for families with lower household incomes.
When compared to families with larger household incomes, a greater percentage of people from households with incomes less that $10,000 per year access certain library services. Use of computers for word processing and Internet access, as well as job search information and large print books are services that are used by a greater percentage of families with lower levels of income.

Libraries support people who are seeking employment.
Of the library users who reported a household income of less than $10,000 per year, 32% of them use their libraries to access job search information, suggesting that some unemployed people rely on their public library to support their job search process.

Library users are very satisfied with the services provided by their public libraries.
Ninety-four percent of respondents circled either a 4 or a 5 on the satisfaction rating scale (scale ranged from 1 to 5 where 1 is "not at all satisfied" and 5 is "very satisfied"), indicating a very high level of satisfaction with library services. Library users highly value library staff and consider library services to be essential to the quality of life in their community.

Overall, library users who responded to the Summer 2002 user survey highly value their public libraries and are very satisfied with the services that they provide. In general, respondents consider it important for public libraries to provide the range of services currently offered, especially access to large print books, talking books and books on tape, as well as access to the Internet. Free access to a variety of materials for all members of the public is seen as a major benefit of the library.

Respondents are extremely satisfied with the current services offered by public libraries. They also highly value the people who work in public libraries, viewing them as helpful, friendly and always willing to support library patrons in accessing the resources they need.

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Introduction

Background

Nova Scotia public libraries provide library and information services to the citizens of the province through a network of 76 branch libraries, mobile branch libraries and Books-By-Mail service. The Nova Scotia library system is organized into nine regions, all of which are funded jointly by the provincial government and municipal councils according to a funding formula. Regional libraries are administered under the *Libraries Act*. Each region is governed by an independent regional library board comprised of representatives from the participating municipal councils, the provincial government and in some cases, members of the public.

Public libraries offer a wide variety of services, such as:

- Collections of materials in a variety of formats for loan to the public;
- Print and electronic reference resources;
- Programs to enhance literacy and research skills for people of all ages;
- Public Internet access;
- Interlibrary loan service;
- Readers' advisory service; and
- Outreach programs to bring library services to targeted populations.

Libraries see themselves as an integral part of the community, and work closely with many other organizations to enrich the community. Public libraries often form partnerships with community economic development networks, literacy training networks, the police, health charities and other government and non-profit agencies.

Purpose of this Report

This report presents the findings of a library user survey conducted in the summer of 2002 throughout Nova Scotia. The survey was developed by dmA Planning and Management Services for the Southern Ontario Library Service as part of the "The Library's Contribution to Your Community: A Resource Manual for Libraries to Document Their Social and Economic Contribution to the Local Community." This resource manual, including survey tools, has been used in a number of Ontario libraries since 1998. The survey tool was modified to include some questions specific to Nova Scotia communities.

The purpose of the survey was to:

- Provide a description of Nova Scotia library users;
- Determine library users' assessment of the contribution made to communities by public libraries; and to
- Assess library users' satisfaction with services provided.

This report highlights and interprets the survey results using a combination of tables, graphics and descriptive text in five major sections. The first section describes the population of library users who completed the survey; the second section addresses the frequency of and reasons for library visits; the third section examines the type of community activities that library users combine with their library visit; the fourth section describes library users' perceptions of the value of public libraries to their communities, and the final section outlines library users' satisfaction with library services.

Sample Characteristics

Table 1: Demographics

Gender		
Male	22%	*n=513*
Female	75%	*n=1791*
No response	3%	*n=99*
Age		
Under 18 years	5%	*n=113*
18 to 64 years	73%	*n=1738*
65 years and over	20%	*n=465*
No response	2%	*n=58*
Education		
Grade 9 or less	4%	*n=84*
Some high school	6%	*n= 148*
Completed high school	19%	*n=459*
Some college	19%	*n=457*
Completed college	31%	*n=744*
Completed post graduate	14%	*n=336*
No response	6%	*n=146*
Annual Household Income		
Less than $10,000	7%	*n=160*
$10, 000 to $30,000	27%	*n=649*
$30,000 to $70,000	40%	*n=946*
$70,000 to $100,000	11%	*n=260*
No response	15%	*n=99*
Retirement Status		
Retired	33%	*n=775*
Not retired	63%	*n=1492*
No response	4%	*n=107*

The survey was administered to a convenience sample of people who visited provincial libraries during an 8-week period between July 1 and August 23, 2002. Patrons who visited town or mobile libraries throughout the province, or who received library books by mail, were invited to complete a survey. A total of 2374 surveys were completed.

Use of a convenience sample requires that the data be interpreted with caution because of the number of biases that result from a non-probability sample. For example, the sample is likely biased in favor of people who use the library more frequently. People who use the library every 2 months or less would be less likely to have visited the library during the data collection period. It is not known if the pattern of responses may have changed if the survey was conducted at a different time of year, instead of over the summer months when many people are on vacation. It is also possible that people who felt most strongly about the value of library services were more likely to complete a survey, thereby resulting in an overestimation of the degree of importance of services.

It is important that the results of the survey not be generalized to the broader Nova Scotia population. It is also uncertain if the data are representative of all library users in Nova Scotia. The data do provide a "snapshot" of people who accessed library services during the data collection period, who were motivated to complete and return a customer satisfaction survey.

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the people who responded to the survey. The data show that three quarters of respondents were female, and that over two-thirds of respondents have completed at least some post-high school education. The majority of respondents fall within the middle and upper income categories. Twenty percent of respondents were 65 or older, and 33% of respondents are retired.

Table 2: Demographics Continued

Language Most Often Spoken at Home		
English	95%	*n=2256*
French	1%	*n=32*
Other	1%	*n=31*
No response	2%	*n=55*
Language of Reading Preference		
English	84%	*n=1989*
French	5%	*n=120*
Other	3%	*n=84*
No response	15%	*n=358*
Own or Rent Residence		
Own	75.3%	*n=1788*
Rent	21.1%	*n=500*
No response	3.6%	*n=86*
Length of Residence in Current Municipality		
One year or less	5%	*n=128*
1 to 3 years	8%	*n=192*
3 to 5 years	7%	*n=160*
5 to 10 years	12%	*n=282*
More than 10 years	66%	*n=1557*
No response	2%	*n=55*
Home Access to Media		
Personal computer	62%	*n=1467*
Internet connection	50%	*n=1176*
Compact Disc Player	73%	*n=1741*
Cassette Player	87%	*n=2031*
VCR	89%	*n=2120*
DVD Player	16%	*n=376*
Cable TV	53%	*n=1262*
Satellite Dish	24%	*n=569*
Home Business		
Operate a business from home	13%	*n=315*

Table 2 shows additional characteristics about the sample population.

English is the language spoken most often at home by 95% of respondents. Respondents were also asked to indicate their preferred languages for reading (note that some respondents gave more than one language of reading preference, so these categories are not mutually exclusive).

The majority of respondents own their residence, and two thirds of respondents have lived in their present municipality of residence for more than 10 years.

Respondents were asked to identify the media-related equipment that they currently have in their home. Cassette players, compact disc players and VCRs are the most common media found in respondents' homes, while DVD players are relatively uncommon (only 16%). One half of respondents have an Internet connection. Over three quarters of respondents have more than basic television services, either via cable or satellite.

Thirteen percent of respondents indicated that they operate a business from their home.

Library Use

Respondents were asked to identify the number of people in their household who visit the library, how often each person visits and the most common reasons that each household member visits the library.

The average number of library users per household is 2.3. Table 3 shows the frequency of library visits *for all household members.* This information includes visits to mobile libraries.

Table 3: Frequency of Library Visits For All Household Members

At least once per week	35%	*n=1953*
Once every 2 to 3 weeks	30%	*n=1657*
Once a month	15%	*n=841*
Once every 2 to 3 months	7%	*n=398*
Less frequently than once every 3 months	7%	*n=406*
Never	6%	*n=325*

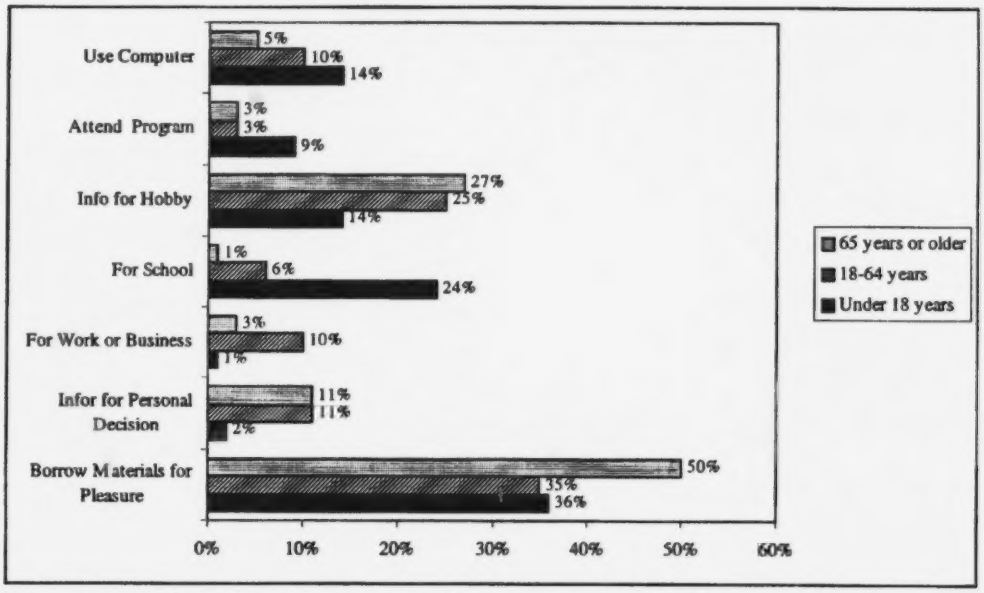
Table 4 shows the most common reasons for using the library *for all household members.* Respondents could give more than one reason for each household member, so the categories are not mutually exclusive.

Table 4: Most Common Reasons for Using the Library For All Household Members

To borrow materials for pleasure	37%	*n=4631*
For information or help to make a personal decision	8%	*n=1033*
For work or business purposes	6%	*n=767*
For school	11%	*n=1342*
For information on a hobby or personal interest	22%	*n=2722*
To attend a program	5%	*n=628*
To use a computer	11%	*n=1429*

There are a few age differences in the most common reasons that people use the library. As shown in Figure 1, half of the people in the 65 and older category state that borrowing materials for pleasure is a reason that they come to the library, compared with about one third of each of the other age categories. Conversely, fewer people in the 65 and older category use the library for computer access compared to the other age categories. As would be expected, more people in the under 18 category access the library for school.

*Figure 1: Reasons for Using the Library by Age Group**



**Note: 58 respondents did not give their age so their responses are excluded from this analysis.*

Respondents were asked to identify which services among a list of 11 items were used by someone in their household. Videos are the most commonly used item among households included in the survey. Thirty-nine percent of households use Internet service at the library, although use of computers for word processing was much lower (17%). Large print books and information about community events, activities and history are used by about one third of households.

All library regions except Halifax asked an additional question on the survey about use of computer training services at public libraries. Sixteen percent (*n=269*) of the non-Halifax respondents (*n=1687*) indicated that someone in their household has accessed computer training.

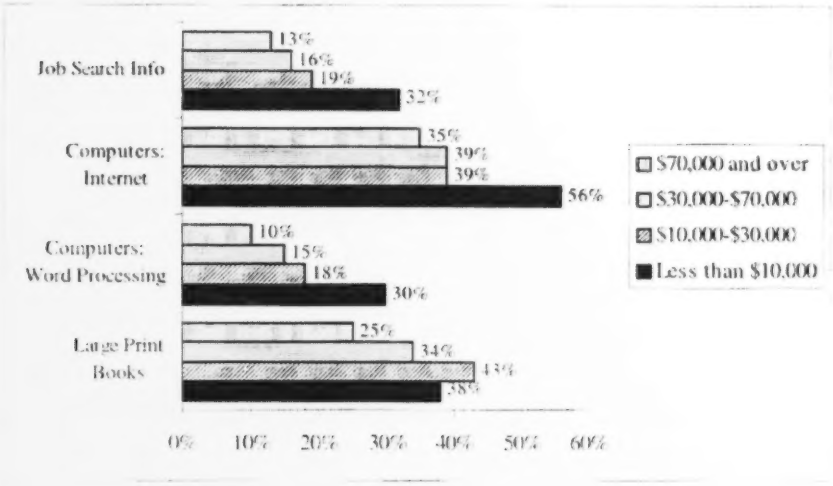
*Table 5: Services Used By All Household Members**

Videos	59%	*n=1400*
Computers for Access to the Internet		
Large Print Books		
Community Events and Activities		
Genealogy Information	18%	*n=457*
Job Search Information	17%	*n=414*
Computers for Word Processing	17%	*n=394*
Materials in Languages Other than English		

**Note: Approximately 30% of respondents did not respond to this survey question.*

A further analysis of services used by income level reveals that a greater percentage of people from households with lower levels of income access certain services, including computers for word processing and Internet access, job search information and large print books. Figure 2 shows these services used by income level.

Figure 2: Services Used By Income Level



In response to the open-ended question "Why did you come to the library today?" the majority of respondents indicated that they were returning or picking up books or videos. Computer use and participation in a children's program are other more frequently cited reasons for attending the library. Children's programs include reading programs, story

telling programs, puppet shows and craft classes. Other reasons for coming to the library on the day that the survey was completed are outlined in Table 6.

Table 6: Reason for Attending the Library Today*

Return or pick up books and/or videos	63%	*n=1620*
Use computer/internet	14.5%	*n=373*
Participate in children's reading program/event/activity	7%	*n=179*
Conduct research	4%	*n=94*
Read a newspaper or magazine	3%	*n=85*
Scheduled visit of the bookmobile	3%	*n=75*
For a social outing/recreation	1%	*n=27*

****Note: Respondents could list more than one reason, therefore categories are not mutually exclusive.***

Concurrent Activities

Respondents were asked if they normally would combine their trip to the library with other activities: shopping, going to the bank or going to a recreation program or facility. Table 7 summarizes the responses to this question.

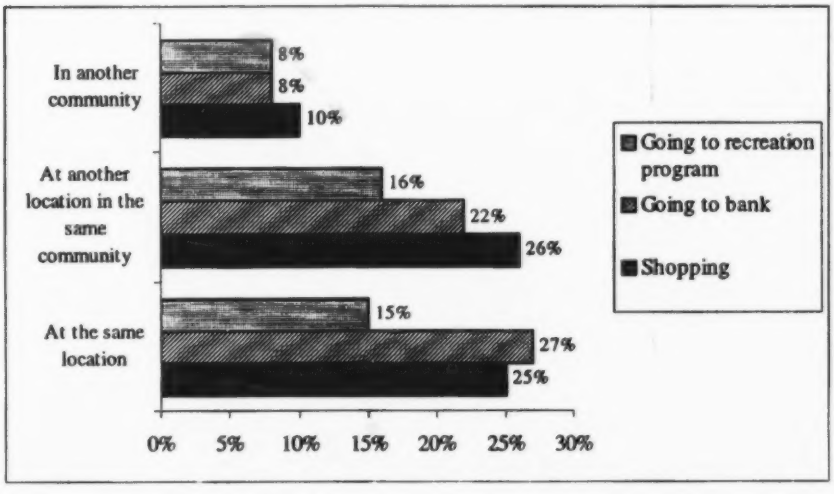
*Table 7: Other Activities During Trip to Library**

Shopping	58%	*n=1366*
Going to the bank	48%	*n=1132*
Going to recreation program or facility	24%	*n=563*

Note: Approximately 20% of respondents did not answer these questions.

Respondents who answered yes to the above question were also asked "if you were not visiting the library at the same time, where would you normally carry out these activities?" This question was asked to determine to what degree the library draws people to the community for other activities. As shown in Figure 3, between 8 and 10% *(n ranges from 187 and 247)* of the respondents who answered this question would carry out these activities in another community if they were not visiting the library.

Figure 3: Location of Other Activities



Importance of the Library

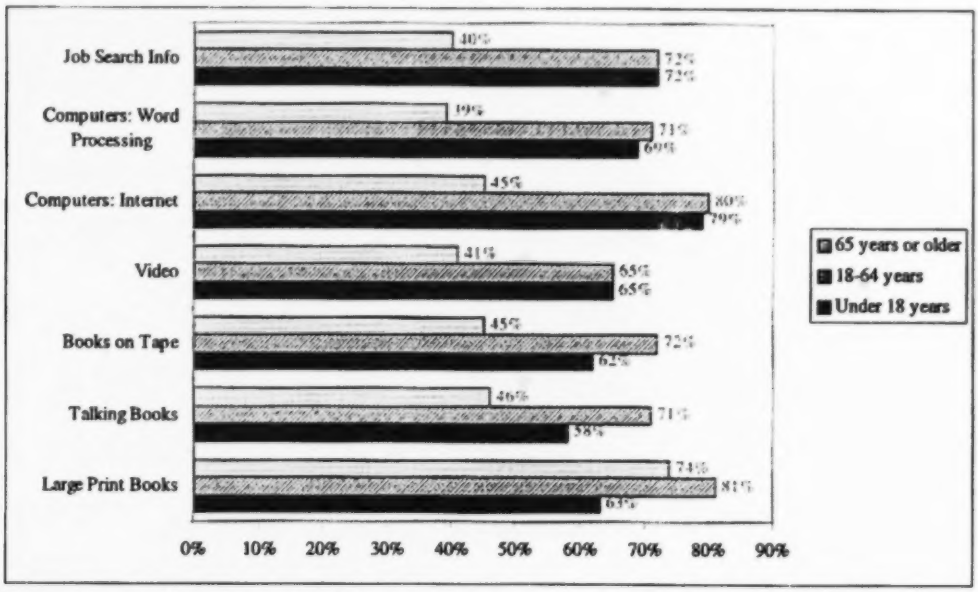
Respondents were asked to rank each of the services in Table 8 in terms of how important the library's provision of each service is to the community. Each service was rated on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is "not at all important" and 5 is "very important". Table 8 shows the percentage of respondents who rated the importance of each service highly (either 4 or 5 on the scale). Interestingly, although only 37% of respondents reported use of large print books by someone in their household, 78% of respondents believe that it is important for the library to provide access to large print books. The same is true for books on tape and talking books, which over two thirds of respondents ranked as important although less than a quarter of households use them. A similar trend is seen for several other services, including information about the community and materials in languages other than English.

Table 8: Importance of Services to Community

Large Print Books	78%	*n=1859*
Computers for Access to the Internet	72%	*n=1720*
Books on Tape	66%	*n=1558*
Talking Books	65%	*n=1552*
Job Search Information	65%	*n=1543*
Computers for Word Processing	64%	*n=1523*
Information on Community History	64%	*n=1509*
Information on Community Events and Activities	60%	*n=1424*
Videos	60%	*n=1429*
Materials in Languages Other than English	57%	*n=1341*
Genealogy Information	54%	*n=1289*

When the importance of services is examined by age group (school-age children and youth, adults, and seniors), the most noticeable trend in the data is the stronger value placed on all services, except large print books, by the adult and under 18 respondents. Access to large print books are considered important by two thirds to three quarters of respondents in every age group. Figure 4 presents the percentage of respondents who rated the importance of each service highly (either 4 or 5) for each of the three age groups.

*Figure 4: Importance of Services to Community by Age Group**



**Note: 58 respondents did not give their age so their responses are excluded from this analysis.*

Importance of the Library for Work, Business or School

Respondents who use the library for work, business or school *(54%, n=1275)* were asked to rate how important the public library is to the work, business or school activities undertaken by members of the household. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is "not at all important" and 5 is "very important", 78% *(n=997)* of respondents gave the library an importance level of either 4 or 5.

Importance of the Library to Satisfaction With Living in the Community

Respondents were asked to rank how important the public library is to their household satisfaction with living in their community. On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is "not at all important" and 5 is "very important", 88% of respondents gave a rating of 4 or 5, indicating that a great majority of survey respondent consider the library to be a key component of their community. When analyzed by age group, it appears that although a greater percentage of older respondents consider the library an important part of their satisfaction with their community, over three quarters of respondents in every age group consider it important (see Table 9).

*Table 9: Importance of Library to Satisfaction Living in Community By Age Group**

Under 18 years	78%	*n=88*
18 to 64 years	88%	*n=1530*
65 years or older	89%	*n=414*

**Note: 58 respondents did not give their age, so their response are excluded from this analysis.*

Respondents were asked via an open-ended question to explain their rating for the question about the importance of the library to their satisfaction with living in the community. Over one third of respondents stated that the library is an asset to the community, providing an important source of entertainment, intellectual stimulation and social contact. The following are examples of comments about this issue given by survey respondents:

- "I could not imagine living in a place where there was not a library . . .libraries link people and communities together." *(Respondent from Western Counties Region)*
- "Living in a rural area is sometimes isolating. Having the services that the library provides helps to lessen the isolation." *(Respondent from Halifax County Region)*
- "A library is a vital part of a small town." *(Respondent from Annapolis Valley Region)*
- "Having a library as part of the community is very important. We checked this out before moving here four years ago." *(Respondent from South Shore Region)*
- "It allows us to break from the isolation we sometimes feel living in remote rural C.B. and provides access to important resources." *(Respondent from Cape Breton Counties Region).*

Six percent of respondents commented on how valuable the mobile library was to their community, by providing easier access to free resources. Four percent of respondents stated that their satisfaction with living in their community was not affected by the presence of a library. Table 10 presents the most frequently cited reasons given to explain the rating for the question about the importance of the library to satisfaction with the community.

*Table 10: Reasons Given For the Community Satisfaction Rating**

Library is community asset providing entertainment, intellectual stimulation and social contact.	36%	*n=871*
Library supports my enjoyment of reading	22%	*n=530*
Library provides cost-free access to resources	12%	*n=275*
Library supports continued learning by access to variety of resources	11%	*n=277*
Mobile library provides easier access to free resources	6%	*n=149*
Library provides access to computers/internet	4%	*n=96*
Library does not affect satisfaction with living in the community	4%	*n=90*

**Note: Respondents could list more than one reason therefore categories are not mutually exclusive.*

Satisfaction with Library Services

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the services provided by the public library on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is "not at all satisfied" and 5 is "very satisfied". Ninety-four percent (n=2220) circled either a 4 or a 5 on the satisfaction rating scale, indicating a high level of satisfaction with library services. When asked if there was anything the library could do to improve services, 38% (*n= 905*) said yes. Table 11 shows the most common improvements that were suggested by these 905 respondents.

*Table 11: Suggestions for Improvement**

More and/or newer books	28%	n=255
Longer open hours	20%	n=181
More and/or improved space	11%	n=98
More and/or newer computers and software	7%	n=63
More videos	6%	n=54
More children's programs	3%	n=24
More large print and/or talking books	2%	n=22
Locate computers in quiet work spaces	2%	n=16
More technical support/training for computer users	2%	n=16
Faster/easier interlibrary loan service	2%	n=15

Note: Respondents could list more than one suggestion therefore categories are not mutually exclusive.

At the conclusion of the survey, respondents were invited to offer additional comments. Sixteen percent of respondents indicated that the staff of their library or bookmobile was very helpful and friendly. Many respondents specifically named helpful individuals from their library, and offered thanks for all of the help that they have provided over the years.

Sixteen percent of respondents commented on how much they value the services of their bookmobile or library in general. Four percent of respondents also stated that library services are essential to individual and community quality of life. Table 12 shows the most common themes that were identified from the open-ended final question inviting additional comments.

Table 12: Themes from the Open-Ended Final Comments Question

Comments		
Library staff are helpful and friendly	16%	n=389
Mobile and branch library services are valued	16%	n=371
Library services are essential to community quality of life	4%	n=84
Value the ability to request books on-line	1%	n=19
Suggestions for Change		
Acquire more and/or newer books	2%	n=46
Extend the open hours of the library	1%	n=30

Note: Respondents could list more than one comment therefore categories are not mutually exclusive.

Summary

Library users who responded to the Summer 2002 user survey highly value their public libraries and are very satisfied with the services that they provide. The most common reasons that library users visit the library are to borrow materials for pleasure, to seek information to support a hobby or personal interest, to support schoolwork or to use a computer. Specific services used most often by survey respondents include videos, Internet access, large print books, and information about community activities, events and community history. It is important to note that computers for Internet access and word processing, job search information and large print books are more used by people with incomes less than $30,000 per year, suggesting that public libraries are helping to ensure equal access to technology and information.

In general, respondents consider it important for public libraries to provide the range of services currently offered, especially access to large print books, talking books and books on tape, as well as access to the Internet. Over half of the survey respondents indicated that they use the library to support their work, business or school-related activities.

Respondents clearly view the library as an important part of their community. The library is seen as a community asset that provides intellectual stimulation, entertainment, and social contact. Free access to a variety of materials for all members of the public is seen as a major benefit of the library.

Respondents are extremely satisfied with the current services offered by public libraries. They also highly value the people who work in public libraries, viewing them as helpful, friendly and always willing to support library patrons in accessing the resources they need.

Appendix 1

Number and Distribution of Surveys Returned

Number and Distribution of Surveys Returned

The first three columns of the table below provide information about the number of surveys distributed and the number and percentage of surveys returned in each region. The last two columns of the table compare the geographical distribution of surveys to the geographical distribution of the provincial population, base don the 2001 census. As evident in these two columns, the Halifax region was somewhat under-represented in the provincial sample, and the Colchester-East Hants region was somewhat over-represented.

Region	*# Surveys Distributed*	*# Surveys Returned*	*% Of Surveys Returned*	*% Of Total Surveys Returned*	*% Of Provincial Population in Region (2001 census)*
Annapolis	531	324	61.0%	13.7%	10.4%
Cape Breton	500	269	53.8%	11.3%	12.9%
Colchester-East Hants	486	288	59.3%	12.1%	7.7%
Cumberland	347	101	29.1%	4.3%	3.6%
Eastern Counties	219	83	37.9%	3.5%	4.5%
Halifax	1050	687	65.4%	28.9%	39.6%
Pictou-Antigonish	364	206	56.6%	8.7%	7.3%
South Shore	500	202	40.4%	8.5%	6.5%
Western Counties	326	214	65.6%	9%	6.9%
TOTAL	4323	2374	54.9%		